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RUSTLERS' END!

By Dick Kraus



OHNNY NARR wheeled his pinto about and pointed up the dusty green slope, to where two men were riding hard, with a third horse in tow! "It's the Kinsey brothers, all right! They've got Prairie Queen with them and they're heading up the slope into the

Rawhide Hills!"

Buck Desimond's tanned hand shaded his eyes against the sun's glare, as he watched the distant riders. "You're right, Johnny!" he husked, kneeing his bay forward. "Let's head

them off from the hills."
With a shrill whope, the two friends urged their horses up the slope toward the fleeing rustlers. An hour before, Buck and Johnny Narr, returning from the town of Washburn, had seen that the young rancher's corral gate was open—and that his prize-winning racing mare, Prairie Queen, was gone 1At once they had set out in pursuit of the stolen horse and her abductors—following them to the foothills.

of the mea country.

Now, with the rustlers in sight, they quirted their bronce into a racking gallop. As they drew closer, Buck raised hits worn black Colt and leveled it. His voice sharp and clear in the thin mountain air, Buck shouted, "Pull up, you sidewinders! Pull up or I'll ventilate

you!"

The ooly reply was a raucous, defiant laugh, as one of the rustlers turned in his saddle, leveled a stubby rifle—and fired! With the barking report of the gun, Johnny Narr clutched at his arm.

"They winged me, Buck!" he grunted, voice edged with pain. "Get after them!"

Jaw set, Buck thundered after the outlives. One of them kept moving with the stolen mare as the other man dropped back, to gun the pursuer off. This second man jumped from his horse and dropped to one knee. He fired, the shot wreathing a cloud of serid gunsmoke above his head. Buck ducked as the shot hummed by. Then it was the rambling cowboy's turn. ... and he did not miss!

 got my shoulder. But I recken my brother Ray's got clear by now! And it looks as if you'll have to take your sidekick and me to the sawbones, afore you take after him! Tough.

It was true! Buck could not continue with the pursuit of the other rustler, who was already out of sight with Prairie Queen. It was more important to get the two wounded men to a doctor without delay!

Three hours later, Buck Desmond faced the sheriff of Washburn, standing in the tiny cell block of the town's only jail. Behind cell bars, Brad Kinsey lay on a cot, bandaged, but still triumphant.

"You two are barking up the wrong cottonwood," the wounded outlaw sneered. "You haven't got a bit of proof against me and Ray! As long as he gets clear, you can't prove a thing against me! Better let me go—sfore I sue you for false arcest!" The grizzled, gray-haired sheriff took Buck

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Buck Desmond shook his head incredulously. "You mean that, even with my say-so, and with Johnny Narr wounded, we can't prove that they ran off with Prairie Queen?"

The sheriff nodded. "Sorry, Buck, but it looks that way! You've got to bring back the evidence, and from what Brad Kinsey says, his brother probably, won't leave any! It's a mighty orner break for young Narr. He spent a heap of greenbacks for the mate! Thought a heap of her, even bought her a solid gold bit. Understand site was ready to foal, too. Tough all around."

Through that night and the next morning. Buck combed the Rawhide Hills in pursue of Ray Kinsey and the stolen mare! Limp with fatigue, Buck was determined to catch the outlaw before he could flee from the territory ... or otherwise dispose of Prairie Queen!

The trail, when he finally located it, wound higher and higher through the mountains, Then, by the edge of a deep ravine, it disappeared-and there was a whole passel of hoofprints. When the trail went on again, over a ridge, there were the prints of only one horse -instead of two. On impulse, Buck moved to the edge of the ravine and looked down. His lips tightened into a thin white line when he saw what lay far below in the narrow chasm. It was the still brown body of a horse-the body of Prairie Queen!

So that's the way the Kinsey brothers get rid of the evidence against them," Buck mut-

Hitching his bay. Buck slowly lowered himself over the sheer edge of the chasm, Carefully, he began to let himself down the steep slope, testing a foothold here and a handhold there. Again and again the earth crumbled dryly beneath his grasp, and he was forced to clutch desperately at a clinging weed or clump of dwarf pine. Then, when he was elmost all the way down the descent, Buck's keen eyes caught a glint of metal off to the

Flattening himself against the side of the ravine, Buck husked, "Looks like company

A shot rang out sharply! Buck flinched as the builet whined past him. Again the unseen marksman fired-with the lead slug missing Buck by inches! But the rambling cowhand realized that he could not escape for long. He was in a trap-end it was up to him to reverse the odds. As the next shot rang out, Buck toppled out of his hiding place. Falling heavily, he landed against the ravine bottom, and

For a moment there was silence. Then Ray Kinsey stepped out from his hiding plece, rifle ready.

"Too bad you're past hearing, Desmond," the outlaw laughed mockingly. "But here's what happened. The mare slipped and fell. elong the trail-end broke her leg. I had to get rid of her then . . . so I dropped her down here. And then I figgered I might es well as use her as a trap, since I knew you'd soon be ! along! You shore made a mistake following

Buck'e hend tightened on the Colt that he etill held in his bruised hand.

30# |"

His head lifted from the ravine floor and, es he pulled the trigger, he spoke. "I hear you, Kinsey-and I still don't think I made a mistake!"

The gun roared-and the outlaw clutched at his arm. With a surprised look on his face, and with the rifle falling from his nerveless fingers, he slumped forward. Painfully, slowly. Buck arose. The fall had been a mean one, but it was necessary to draw Kinsey from his hiding place. Now what remained to be done was to get the evidence that would send the horsethieving brothers to the scaffold!

LATER THAT afternoon, Buck faced the sheriff of Washburn and his rancher friend, Johnny Narr. Johnny was lying in bed, his face drawn end disconsolate,

"I don't care about the money," he said, "Prairie Queen might have broken her leg by accident-so Kinsey killed her to get rid of the evidence and set a trap for you! But they're still guilty and they've got to be pun-

ished!" The sheriff broke in, "Remember, Buck, we've still got to produce evidence against them. You couldn't get the mare up out of that ravine, could you?"

"No," said Buck, "But I brought some other He reached a hand under his worn levi jacket

and drew out a colid gold bit. "Recognize this?" he esked. "It was the mare's . . . end I guess your harness-maker will testify to that!"

HEN Buck smiled. "And I brought some more evidence too, Johnny! The news isn't all bad . . ." He crossed to the door and. reaching out, drew in a slender, furry young colt- standing on wobbly legs. Young as he was, he had the look of Prairie Queen, the look of a champion, about him!

"If you remember, Prairie Queen was about to foal! She died," he eaid, "but first ehe gave life to this colt. He was protected by her body during the fall-and he was unharmed! I found him hiding by her side. If that bridle isn't enough evidence against the rustlers, the colt should do the trick!"

The sheriff nodded, his eyes moist, "He will, Buck," he said. "He'll be enough to convince any jury-and to prove to any more wouldbe rustlers that horse-stealing is a crime we don't aim to have going on in this stete!"

THE END

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